

celebrate and commemorate American liberty, American independence, and American freedom.

Our military has helped us provide that, both here at home but also, importantly, abroad.

I had the opportunity to go on a congressional delegation—Senate delegation with two of my Senate colleagues, Senator COONS and Senator DUCKWORTH, a couple weeks ago to Korea—South Korea and Taiwan.

And it doesn't matter where you are from in America, whether you are a Democrat or a Republican, when you go overseas and you go to countries like that, countries and places that literally exist because of the sacrifice of the American military, it makes you humble, and it makes you proud.

South Korea and Taiwan—vibrant economics, vibrant democracies. And if you know the history, those two places wouldn't be that way if it weren't for the sacrifice, literally, of tens of thousands of Americans.

It is no exaggeration to say—whether it is in those places or in places at home or in Europe or in Asia—that the United States has been one of the most powerful forces for liberating humankind from oppression and tyranny than any other force in the world.

Think about it. Hundreds of millions of people across the world and in our own country, over the decades, have been liberated by men and women wearing the uniform of the United States.

As we contemplate the Fourth of July week, weekend, that is something every American can take pride in and should take pride in.

But as we all know, freedom is not free. Many of us think that defending our Nation should be our priority No. 1 as part of our job in the U.S. Senate. Budgets are a reflection of an administration's values and priorities.

And if you look at this budget—this is the \$6 trillion blowout budget of the Biden administration, where up here you have every single Federal Agency with double-digit—20-percent increases, 40-percent increases, 15-percent increases across the board.

The two Agencies charged with the national security of our Nation, the Department of Defense and Homeland Security, in terms of priorities for this administration, are dead last.

Actually, if you adjust the budgets for inflation, these are cuts—almost 3 percent cut in our military budgets and probably close to 4 to 5 percent for Homeland Security.

Budgets reflect values of administrations and priorities, and this administration, right now, is prioritizing our military and our national defense dead last.

We had the Secretary of Defense and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in front of the Armed Services Committee last week, and I showed them this chart, and I asked them: How can you tell the troops that you lead that this administration

prioritizes our military and national defense over other missions of the Federal Government?

They couldn't give a really good answer because there is no good answer. If you look at this chart, if you look at the Biden administration's budget, they are prioritized at the bottom.

This is a battle of ideas, and when we come back from the Fourth of July recess, we are going to have this battle. I know I have colleagues, Democrats and Republicans—I have spoken to many on both sides of the aisle—who fundamentally disagree with this—fundamentally disagree with this.

You might remember last summer we had a debate when Senator SANDERS brought forth his defund the Pentagon amendment. That is what he called it. At the height of defunding the police, we had Senators saying we are going to now defund the Pentagon—15 percent across-the-board cuts to the military. That is what Senator SANDERS wanted.

By the way, Senator SCHUMER was a cosponsor of that.

And now they are in charge here, the majority leader, the chairman of the Budget Committee, and in many ways they are getting what they wanted—almost 3 percent cut to our military.

I guarantee it is not what the American people want; it is not what my constituents want; and I don't think it is what the vast majority of U.S. Senators want.

So we are going to battle this. We are going to battle this, and I am going to ask my Senate colleagues on both sides of the aisle to work with me to reject this. We need to reject this. We shouldn't prioritize our military dead last, which is what the Biden administration and, unfortunately, some of my colleagues here are doing.

I would like to end by just noting that tomorrow is actually another anniversary. We were talking about the Fourth of July, but June 25 is the 71st anniversary of the outbreak of the Korean war, which was June 25, 1950.

Unfortunately, not enough Americans, in my view, have a lot of knowledge of the Korean war. It is even called the forgotten war. I don't think it should be called the forgotten war. It should be called the noble war because Americans went to a place they didn't even know to defend freedom, which they did after a hard, difficult, violent struggle.

But in the summer of 1950, we lost thousands and thousands of young Americans, young American soldiers, young American servicemen. Why?

Because they were not prepared to fight. We went from 1945, having probably the most formidable military in the history of the world, to 5 years later—because of defense cuts, because of lack of leadership by civilian and military leaders in the United States—a military that could not fight, a military where we lost thousands of young American soldiers because they weren't ready because budgets had been gutted.

We can never allow that to happen again, and as we head into the Fourth

of July weekend to celebrate the Fourth of July and our hard-fought freedoms and liberty, we need to look at this budget, come back here and say to the President and others: We are not—we are not going to prioritize the national security of our Nation last.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Maine.

AFGHANISTAN

Mr. KING. Madam President, I rise to talk about a moral obligation and a national security obligation.

We are leaving Afghanistan after 20 years, the longest war in the country's history. During the entirety of that 20 years, there were brave people in Afghanistan—Afghanistan people—who helped us, who were translators, who were guides, who assisted us in the struggle against terrorism and in the struggle against the Taliban.

And as we leave, those people are in grave danger. The Taliban has made no secret of the fact that they are in grave danger. They have already started killing them.

If we leave without providing for the safety of those people, providing them a way to maintain their lives, it will be a stain on this country that will exist for generations.

Not only is it a moral and ethical obligation, though, it is a national security obligation because if we don't take care of the people who took care of us, who is going to come to our aid the next time? Who is going to come to the aid of the Americans who turn their backs on those that risk their lives on behalf of this country? The answer is no one.

So this is not only an ethical and moral obligation, this is a matter of national security in terms of our standing in the world and our ability to work with allies and others against adversaries of this country and other countries in the world.

The average time, I am told, it now takes to process the paperwork for one of the people whom we are trying to get out of Afghanistan through the special visa program is 600 days. We are going to have a military presence in Afghanistan less than 90 days. There is a mismatch there.

We have got to take steps to protect these people. Now, maybe its surging—we have talked about military surges; let's surge some paperwork people to get this work done faster. But I don't believe we are going to be able to do that.

Now, by the way, I am not saying we open the door to everyone—there are 18,000 people on their list; that is not to mention their families—that we just open the door and say everybody come here because, as we know, Afghanistan has been the home to very dangerous terrorist groups, al-Qaida, ISIS, and others.

So we do have to have some processing, but we have to be able to process these people in a way that protects

us in terms of our national security but also gets them out of harm's way. One possibility—and I am delighted that just a few hours ago, the President mentioned that he is going to be working with other countries to find a safe place to move these people while we are doing the processing. I think that is exactly what we have to do. We can't just hope that when we leave in August or September 11, as the deadline the President has established, that we just hope that the Taliban won't take over Kabul, that the Taliban won't take over other regions of the country and start murdering people who helped us.

This isn't a speculative problem. This isn't something we think may happen. They have told us it is going to happen. And I have learned all my life, believe people when they tell you what they are going to do, and this is one of those situations. We know what is coming. If what ends up coming is a bloodbath, that blood is on our hands.

I have talked about the national security, but I think, more important, this is a moral and ethical obligation to meet the safety needs of those people who have helped us. I have friends who have fought in Afghanistan, and they are agonized about this. They are agonized about what is going to happen to people that they know, that they have worked with, and that have put their lives on the line for America. What is going to happen to those people when we leave?

This is a moment of test for this country. This is a trial for us, and history is going to judge us as to how we meet this test. This isn't something—we are not talking about landing a man on the Moon or some kind of terrible technological challenge; this is just putting resources in the right place and making the arrangements to take care of these people. It can be done. It can be done. And if it isn't done, shame on us.

I know that is a phrase that is often used, but it fits in this case. If we don't protect those who protected us, shame on us.

On December 1, 1862, Abraham Lincoln came to this Capitol to talk about the course of the Civil War and what was happening. And he was trying to move the Congress out of the politics as usual as they dealt with this extraordinary crisis. His final words echo over the last 100-plus years, and I think they apply exactly today. Here is what Abraham Lincoln said:

Fellow-citizens, we cannot escape history. We of this Congress and this administration, will be remembered in spite of ourselves. No personal significance, or insignificance, can spare one or the other of us. The fiery trial which we [now] pass, will light us down, in honor or dishonor, to the latest generation.

This is a test of the moral integrity of this country. We must—we must—defend those who have defended us from a peril that we know is imminent.

This fiery trial through which we pass this summer, will light us down—we in the Congress and the administra-

tion, as Lincoln said, “will light us down, in honor or dishonor, to the latest generation.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. WARNOCK). The Senator from Rhode Island.

Mr. REED. Mr. President, let me commend the stirring and thought-provoking words of my colleague from Maine, Senator KING, about our responsibility with respect to those who aided and assisted us in Afghanistan and the status of this Special Immigrant Visa Program.

I think we have to begin with the decision to leave, which puts these individuals at risk. In many respects, President Biden's hands were tied from the outset with regard to our policy in Afghanistan. He inherited a flawed agreement from the Trump administration, which required the United States to withdraw all military forces by May 1 in exchange for the Taliban's agreement not to attack the U.S. and coalition forces and to constrain al-Qaida from using Afghanistan as a safe haven.

It does not appear that the Taliban has observed many of the conditions of this agreement, but we have observed the condition of leaving promptly. The President originally set a date of September 11, but military personnel have been able to rapidly redeploy, and within weeks, we should be moving all of our military personnel.

The manner in which this agreement was reached was also deeply flawed. It was negotiated exclusively between the Trump administration and the Taliban, keeping our allies, even the Afghan Government, out. President Trump's go-it-alone, rush-to-the-exits mentality led to a deal where the Taliban emerged as the key benefactor while the United States and our allies won very little. And while the Taliban has held the condition of not attacking the United States or its allies, as I indicated before, the remaining conditions were virtually unenforceable. By any measure, the Taliban has clearly violated the spirit of the agreement as overall violence inside Afghanistan has steadily increased over the last year. The Taliban has also not made clear that it will constrain al-Qaida as required by the agreement.

During this transition period, the Taliban has gained enormous momentum on the battlefield. As the Washington Post recently reported, Taliban commanders, motivated by their battlefield gains, have “overrun a number of Afghan bases, even as U.S. air support for the Afghan army has dwindled, and set up numerous checkpoints along the main highways leading in and out of Kabul.”

At least 24 Afghan commandos and police officers were killed in an ambush by the Taliban in northern Afghanistan just last week.

It appears that the Taliban's tactics will only continue to intensify as the transition of U.S. and coalition per-

sonnel continues, especially as our airstrikes decline. According to the New York Times, there have been multiple instances where the Taliban, taking advantage of the situation, has been able to negotiate the surrenders of Afghan forces. By their count, since May 1, at least 26 outposts and bases have surrendered after such negotiations.

Violence has increased against the civilian population as well, including a horrific attack against a school outside of Kabul, chillingly timed to target teenage girls leaving class.

The Taliban's steady gains are contrasted with peace talks in Doha that appear to be going at a glacial pace. With these dynamics, the Taliban has no strategic interest to sit down and discuss power sharing. The government of Afghanistan appears to hold a much weaker hand in these negotiations, having proven unable to govern in a way that earns the confidence of the people.

These concerning political and security developments are playing out against the backdrop of regional players that should have high incentives to cooperate to ensure stability and security of Afghanistan. However, nations like Iran, Russia, and China may in fact be working at cross-purposes to the U.S. interests, and others, such as Pakistan, could be using their influence in a much more constructive manner than they are today.

Taken together, these dynamics create a highly challenging landscape. If not addressed deliberately, they could cause a cascade of instability both inside Afghanistan and across the region. To mitigate such an outcome, we must exercise caution and plan prudently.

And again, echoing the comments of Senator KING, this brings me to one of the most immediate and pressing consequences of the situation. How do we help those whose lives were put on the line because they assisted the United States?

There are many press reports of the Taliban threatening Afghan civilians who helped us. USA Today profiled one Afghan interpreter who explained: “If the U.S. forces leave Afghanistan . . . I cannot guarantee for one minute what's going to happen with me, with my family.”

These threats cannot be ignored. We must demonstrate that we have the capacity to protect those who have a target on their backs because of their association with the United States. More than that, we must ensure that we continue to secure the irreplaceable assistance of the people who willingly risk their lives to help the United States the next time our servicemembers are in a conflict in a distant land. If we set the example of leaving those who assisted us behind, who will assist us in the future?

Currently, the processing of Afghan candidates through Special Immigration Visas or SIVs, which the State Department says is the primary focus, may prove too little, too late. While

the backlog of candidates is 18,000 today, it is unclear how many potential SIV candidates will feel compelled to apply as conditions change on the ground. Processing applications has been further complicated by a long vetting process, declining security conditions, and a recent spike in COVID cases across Afghanistan, which has forced the Embassy to shut down visa interviews. In order to handle the demand, we must add at least 20,000 additional visas for the next fiscal year and do so immediately and find other ways to further streamline the process, as Senator KING described.

We may also come to find that the SIV category does not encompass all those Afghans who would likely be targeted by the Taliban. We should be identifying others who may be at risk and start planning to ensure the safety of those who would seek asylum as a consequence of a potential Taliban takeover or if control of the country fractures.

Now is the time to think about creative solutions and, importantly, understand what will be necessary to ensure that we live up to our moral obligations. I know full well that the United States is capable of this. We have been publicly assured by the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, General Milley, and Commander of Central Command, General McKenzie, that the military can carry out such an evacuation, if directed to do so. We have successfully conducted evacuations of refugee populations in the past, including a significant number of Vietnamese refugees in 1975, Iraqi Kurds in 1996, and Kosovo Albanians in 1999. It is imperative that we deliver upon our promises now.

Providing safe harbor for these Afghans who are most vulnerable is front of mind, but we must also ensure that there is a farsighted planning process across the board to ensure success following the transition of our military forces. And I would like to quickly highlight several key questions.

First, can the United States and its allies and partners continue to constrain the threat from terrorist groups like al-Qaida and ISIS that would seek to use Afghanistan as a base for operations?

The Biden administration has discussed its intent to conduct over-the-horizon operations, but we need to ensure that we have accounted for this complexity and are postured for success.

Second, how will the United States continue to distribute and oversee aid to the Afghan Government and Afghan security forces? The Afghan Government remains unable to generate enough revenue to independently fund its military operations, instead relying almost solely on foreign contributions.

We must have robust mechanisms in place to ensure the aid is provided and goes to the intended places.

Third, how can the international community assist the Afghan security

forces with maintaining readiness, particularly air power—after all international contractors depart the country? Again, that is another term of the Doha agreement. After 20 years, we have not created a cadre of individuals inside Afghanistan who can independently conduct high-level maintenance on its aircraft, which raises serious questions about how the Afghans can continue air operations without international contracting support.

Fourth, does the international community have real leverage to affect Taliban behavior through political and diplomatic channels? Now is the time to understand what levers are available to mitigate a potentially disastrous situation for the people of Afghanistan, and particularly that of women and girls.

Fifth, will NGOs be able to continue activities to benefit the people of Afghanistan? There appears to be a lack of coordination, including by the Department of Defense, to ensure deconfliction methods are appropriately transitioned to the Afghan Government, which puts humanitarian at risk and could delay the delivery of lifesaving assistance to populations living in hard-to-reach areas.

The time to address these challenges is now. I urge the Biden administration to continue to work through these pressing issues, and I call upon Congress to assist where we can. The consequences of inaction are too great to risk. We must rapidly increase the number of SIV visas, and we must, along with the administration, plan for all the contingencies that I have outlined.

With that, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New York.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST— S. 1520

Mrs. GILLIBRAND. Mr. President, I rise for the 15th time, today, to call for every Senator to have the opportunity to consider and cast their vote for the Military Justice Improvement and Increasing Prevention Act. This bill would move serious crimes like sexual assault out of the chain of command and put them in the hands of the most capable people in the military: independent, impartial, highly trained prosecutors.

I began calling for the full floor vote on May 25. That was about a month ago. In that month, an estimated 1,736 servicemembers will have been raped or sexually assaulted. More will have been victims of other serious crimes. Many will not even report those crimes because they lack faith in the system where cases are decided by their commanders, not by trained lawyers. And yet this vote continues to be delayed and denied day after day, week after week.

I have heard proponents of this bill argue that we can't make this change because the military lacks the lawyers

necessary to carry out the work. Today, I would like to address this one unfounded claim.

Let's look at the numbers. The Navy, for example, has an Active Duty population of just over 330,000 members. Their military justice system has 935 military lawyers, or judge advocates known as JAGs. That number includes more than 100 special litigators and 85 at the 06-level JAG, which means the colonel or above commanders. And last year, they completed just 78 general courts martial, which are usually cases involved in serious felonies that our bill discusses.

Now, let's look at the civilian counterpart. Take the San Diego County District Attorney's Office. San Diego County has a population of 3.3 million people. To serve that population, the DA's office has just 300 prosecutors who handle 40,000 cases a year.

So the Navy has one-tenth of the population but three times the lawyers. In total, our armed services have just over 1.3 million members and more than 4,000 JAGs. The issue with our military justice system is not that it lacks the lawyers. It is that it does not entrust the most serious crimes to the people who are most professional and trained to address them.

In fiscal year 2020, the armed services completed 720 general courts martial, and in fiscal year 2019, they completed 895 general courts martial. If 300 prosecutors in San Diego County can handle 40,000 cases a year, I trust that more than 4,000 JAGs in our military, some of our Nation's best and brightest, can handle 895 general courts martial.

I have trust in those military lawyers' ability to handle these cases because they are in fact already working on them. This reform would not give them more work. Instead, it would relieve them of the time-consuming work it takes to get a commander properly briefed on cases and allow them to make decisions on those cases instead of just making recommendations to commanders.

In short, making this reform would not require finding a host of new lawyers to do this work or to overtax the lawyers our military already has. Any claims otherwise are nothing more than a delay tactic.

The Military Justice Improvement and Increasing Prevention Act will deliver results our servicemembers and their families deserve. It is supported by the experts, by servicemembers, and by a bipartisan, filibuster-proof majority of Senators, and it is time we bring this to the floor.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that at a time to be determined by the majority leader, in consultation with the Republican leader, the Senate Armed Services Committee be discharged from further consideration of S. 1520 and the Senate proceed to its consideration; that there be 2 hours for debate equally divided in the usual form; and that upon the use or yielding